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ELK ISLAND NATIONAL PARK



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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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ELK ISLAND NATIONAL PARK

Second Edition

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
National Parks of Canada
Ottawa



THE WAPITI OR CANADIAN ELK

ELK ISLAND NATIONAL PARK

WITHIN an hour's motor ride from Edmonton, Alberta, lies Canada's second largest fenced animal reserve, Elk Island National Park. This reserve, the first animal sanctuary to be established by the Dominion Government, has been in existence since 1906 and was originally created for the preservation of elk or wapiti. This noble animal, once found in numbers on the prairies, was then fast disappearing before the oncoming tide of settlement and the increasing inroads of hunters. In 1903 it was brought to the attention of the Government that a herd of these animals numbering about seventy-five head, was then roaming among the Beaver Hills to the east of Edmonton. Game authorities reported that this was probably the last large wild herd in existence in this part of Canada. Accordingly, a number of lovers of wild life strongly advised the Government that it would be a commendable action to fence in an enclosure in this district and thus create a sanctuary which would serve to protect this interesting native species as well as moose and black-tailed or mule deer, which were also known to have their habitat in the same region. The suggestion received the sympathetic consideration of the Dominion Government and steps were at once taken to acquire the land. The first area, covering sixteen square miles in township 54, ranges 19 and 20, which had originally formed part of the Cooking Lake Forest Reserve, was set aside as a park in 1906, and fenced during the same year. The animals enclosed numbered about thirty head of fine elk, an equal number of mule deer, and a few moose.



THE MOOSE

The Buffalo Herd

When in 1907, the Government of Canada purchased the Pablo herd of buffalo numbering 716 animals, Elk Island National Park was utilized as a home for the first shipments of these animals until Buffalo National Park near Wainwright was made ready for their reception. In June of that year the first trainload of 199 buffalo arrived at Lamont, Alberta, and the animals were successfully transferred to the park. In October of the same year a second trainload of 211 animals was also sent north from Montana to this reserve, making a total of 410 head in all. These buffalo remained at Elk



PART OF THE BUFFALO HERD

Island Park until 1909. By this time the fence at the new Buffalo National Park had been completed, and this area made ready for the herd. Owing to natural decreases and losses due to the change of environment, the number of buffalo in Elk Island Park at that time was about 370. Of these, 325 were transferred to the Buffalo Park, and the remainder, numbering about 45 head, were left in Elk Island Park to form the nucleus of an additional herd there.

During the twenty-five years following, under careful supervision, these buffalo steadily increased in number, so that to-day the park contains a herd more than twice as large as that originally purchased from Michael Pablo. The total number of animals in Elk Island

Park on December 31, 1933, was estimated as follows: buffalo, 1,611; elk, 489; moose, 473; mule deer, 220. The buffalo at Elk Island Park are fine examples of the species. Their pelage is particularly dark and thick and the animals are all sturdy and well developed. Although the buffalo are much less wild than when originally captured, it is inadvisable for visitors to go near them on foot, although they may be approached with safety in an automobile. Both the moose and elk are also finely developed specimens of their kind.

To the people of Canada a sentimental interest must always attach to the buffalo. Up to half a century ago it was the outstanding big game animal of the Dominion and there are men still living



A SMALL BAND OF ELK

who saw in boyhood, herds numbering tens of thousands roaming the western plains. In the development of Western Canada it played a part which can never be ignored. Without this source of natural food the opening up of the West must have been rendered infinitely more difficult. To the early settlers and explorers the buffalo spelt food, clothing, and shelter. Its meat was as well flavoured and as nutritious as the finest of beef; its thick robe furnished covering and clothing against the winter cold; its hide was used for tepees and boats, while its horns, hair, hoofs, and bones furnished many articles of use and adornment. The success which has attended the Government's efforts for the restoration and conservation of the species

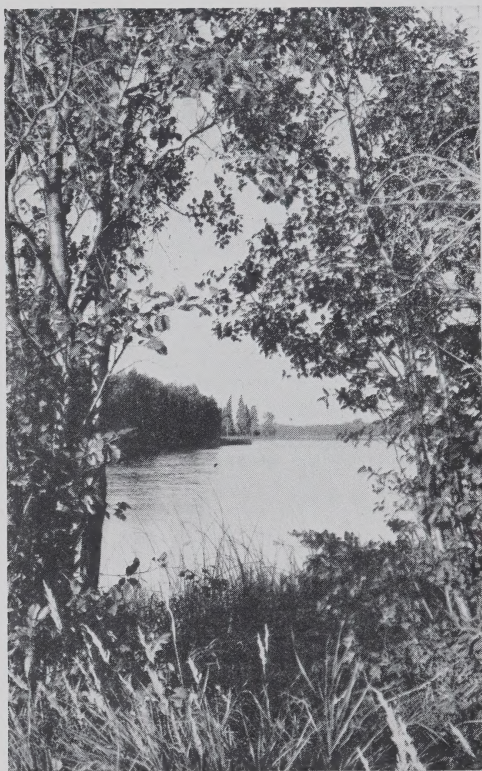
appears now to ensure the continuance of the buffalo and it seems likely that it will remain to provide a source of increasing interest to all lovers of wild life.

Topographical Features

In 1922, owing to the rapidly increasing numbers of the herds, the area of Elk Island Park was extended by the addition of thirty-six square miles of territory, lying immediately south of the original reserve. The land, which had previously formed part of the Cooking Lake Forest Reserve, was admirably suited to the purposes of the

park, since it consisted principally of open pasture lands unfitted for agricultural settlement, but well watered with small lakes and possessing good hay meadows capable of supplying feed for the animals in the winter season. The entire Park area is surrounded by thirty-four miles of nine-strand, buffalo-proof wire fence. Fireguards, sixteen feet in width, are ploughed about the park, both immediately inside and outside the fence.

Elk Island Park has become a sanctuary for many kinds of waterfowl and upland game birds as it provides in abundance excellent shelter and natural breeding grounds. Wild duck and goose have also apparently discovered that within this area they will be safe from molestation and they rest here in thousands on their way to the



ASTOTIN LAKE

northern breeding grounds while many remain to nest by the shores of the numerous lakes. Blue heron are also found in large numbers, and the park also affords excellent protection and breeding areas for sharp-tailed and ruffed grouse and both these species are now abundant.

The chief lakes in the southern part of the park are Tawayak and Little Tawayak. North of Tawayak Lake lie Oster, Paul, and Long lakes. The finest lake in the park is the Astotin Lake, situated in the northern section of the park. This is a beautiful body of water, approximately two and a half by one and a half miles, and containing twenty-one islands, of which Long Island is the largest. South of Long Island and near the southern shore of the lake is Elk Island, to which the park owes its name. East of Long Island is Crane Island, noted for its rookery of the blue heron.



BLUE HERON

Park Headquarters and Sandy Beach

On the western side of Astotin Lake are located the Park Headquarters and Superintendent's residence, where full information may be obtained concerning the herds of animals and the various points of interest in the park. On the opposite shore of the lake lies Sandy Beach, where a beautiful stretch of fine, white sand provides delightful opportunities for bathing. Considerable development work has been carried out here for the comfort and pleasure of visitors, including the construction of campgrounds equipped with shelters, tables, benches, and camp-stoves. Areas have been set apart as picnic and recreation grounds, while three modern bath-houses built on the lake shore provide accommodation for bathers free of charge. A number of boats are available for hire from private parties. Camping permits are issued at the rate of one dollar per month per tent, and may be obtained from the Park Superintendent.

Approaches to the Park

The park is readily accessible from the main provincial highways and is also served by the Canadian National Railways. The

southern gateway to the park lies about thirty miles east of Edmonton and about thirty-five miles west of Vegreville on Provincial Highway No. 15. From the gateway a good motor road leads north through the park providing access to the Park Headquarters and Astotin Lake. From the north an excellent road connects the Park Headquarters and Sandy Beach with the town of Lamont, situated on Provincial Highway No. 16.



BATHERS AT SANDY BEACH

Rail connections with the park may be made from Ardrossan, a small station on the main line of the Canadian National Railways, seventeen miles east of Edmonton. The distance from Ardrossan to the southern gateway of the park via Provincial Highway No. 15 is approximately thirteen miles. On the north the Winnipeg-Saskatoon-Edmonton branch of the Canadian National Railways passes within a few miles of the park and visitors may alight at Lamont, which is a little more than five miles distant from the northeast corner of the park.

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